Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

"The Idea of Order at Key West"
—Wallace Stevens
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*Denotes Freshman Writing
Sister

by Sarah Hill

I
We are bad copies of one another.
We were dropped into similar sacks;
we ride in the same bones.
Our eyes slant in one fine line.
Our lips curl into mirrored sneers.
We are each other's first person singular.

II
We have been wedged apart—
driven into angry circlings
like two starving cats (which we are).
We fatten our skinny guts on the same prey
and fight for the rotting carcass.
We guard our narrow alleyways with ease.
They lie opposite one another
on the same street.

III
Let me move you into a softer light.
Let me hide the flaws of your face
by setting you in a dark and quiet frame.
I want to study you in the dark,
to learn your look in the unfamiliar
contour of shadow.
There is Trouble in the Forest, Fifteen Years After Donald Barthelme's "Indian Uprising".

by David Paul Graham

Our condominiums were in danger. The gnarled roots and trunks of the new, highly evolved trees quietly searched the solid, cardboard foundations of our buildings and effortlessly toppled them at times. Men took shifts sitting in open shelters with McCulloch chain saws cradled in their arms, while the women explained to their children that all the Comanches were again safe in the reservations. The compromising Treaty of '69 made all this possible. The treaty was made after the Indian uprising in '68. Sylvia and I had lived through this uprising, but now, fifteen years later, in a manufactured world, Nature herself came back from the cemetery and haunted our daily ruts. Nothing changes. We tie it all together with words.

"Do you think we are better off now than when we were married ten years ago?"

She surveyed the real, plastic table top, littered with a three volume television guide, a pitcher of lemonade made with NutraSweet, Betty Crocker's New Microwave Cookbook, and the latest album and video called Men without Dresses. She answered.

"No."

When the crafty trees break through our smooth, concrete world and threaten our safety and our armed soldiers revert to the ancient art of "lumberjacking," we stop the enemy in its tracks. As the chain saws rip the limbs of an encroaching foe and the neighborhood is silenced in this act of safety, the artists creep from the basements to gather the fresh, dead wood. Their clothes become stained with the sticky sap. Once, I remember, in La Plaza de Ho Chi Minh, the trees attached, were repelled, and as the artists gathered the dead pieces of carcasses, a second wave broke through the soft pavement. In the army's haste to turn this wave, they dropped thirteen elms on the backs of four artists. Four artists who supplied Ayres with totem poles.

Sylvia and I awaited the arrival of our snow man, Jeremiah DeMoron. He delivered our monthly ration of cocaine, which we exhausted in one week. We used it to relive our white wedding and even whiter honeymoon. The chain saws roared to life outside our division, and the battalion of men chased the oaks down Calle de Saigon. Drops of orange sap spattered on our window and glued everything together.

In the middle of our honeymoon, Sylvia asked, "Are you a comedian?"

"No my profound heart; and yet (by the very fangs of malice I swear) I am not that I play. Are you the lady of the house?"

"No. I swear you know nothing."

"I've been told that before."

I shoved the red straw into my nose and fell in love, I fell into a crevice in the concrete at the corners of Grenada Avenue and Calle de Laos. When Block found me, and pulled me back into the world, I no longer felt like using
my blue and red Marathon credit card. Block and Sylvia, who had been reenacting The Scarlet Letter while I slept below the pavement, sent me to Dr. R., (a student of Miss R.'s). Block hung himself from the top of a lumbering poplar, (before it was hewed by the soldiers), and was buried at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, who has now been named General Earle Eele. General Eele once said, "the essence of Vietnam is military," when some people were thinking that it was economic or political. I wished to talk to Dr. R. of how, fifteen years ago, Jane was a social prostitute and my wife was a virgin. They have now switched the roles. Dr. R. told me that the "nutshell" tools of Miss R. were traded for the vagueness of psychiatry and that I was a monomaniac, obsessed with buying love. (I bought Sylvia a totem pole.) On the east side of our condominium division, the Cuban sector, the men were trying to defend a strong tree movement. They used Bic butane flame throwers to back up the McCulloch chain saws. The city was on fire, waiting for the flood.

Now the P.L.O., used to killing men in the name of freedom, had to respond to the break in symmetry caused by these trees. (Rian had come, for the meantime.) Sylvia and I saw on the news, on eighty-five channels, that the
P.L.O. did not want to fight because they knew they would lose. We saw grey suited anchormen introduce blue uniformed strategists who told us that our concrete world was safe. The Air Force began to use napalm bombs. Robert Vally swore that he loved the smell of napalm in the morning. I became sick, and Sylvia, dressed in red and blue sequined jeans, scurried away. She went to seventeen-seventy-six Beirut Lane, which was always quiet and safe. She commissioned an artist to carve a small “B” from a poplar scrap. Sylvia wore this symbol on a necklace and loved me. Dr. T. insisted on having coffee and asked me to try to remember fourteen certain things.

“All I can remember at this moment is the Indian uprising in sixty-eight.”

“What do you remember about it?” he asked.

“Jane was bitten by a dwarf, and we had to make a compromise with the Commanches.”

“Who is Jane?”

“Jane was a prostitute, but now is a virgin. I do not love Jane, I love Sylvia. Repetition. I wanted her then and I want her now, here in the middle of this dark forest.”

“Relax. You cannot battle again. Your eyes have been blurred.”

“Blurred. ‘Because in Vietnam the vision of a Burning Babe is multiplied, multiplied!’ I screamed and ran out of this white office. I ran to J.C. Penney’s, where I purchased fifty, green GI Joe dolls for Sylvia and Uncle. I paid for them with my blue and gold Mastercharge card. As I left, I slipped in a pile of orange sap and could smell burning leaves.

Sylvia had lost her arm on Tay Ninh Drive. The sergeants were recruiting women now, but these women were not used to the chain saws, nor the flame throwers. I went back to look for the limb, shoved the red straw into my nose and loved her more.

On Calle de Hanoi, I was accosted by Speed, who said, “You are the lover of Sylvia?”

“Go to sir; tell me, do you know Madam Sylvia?”

“She that your worship loves?”

“Why, how know you that I am in love?”

“Marry, by these special marks: first you have learned, like Sir Block, to wreath your arms, like a malcontent; to relish a love song, like a robin-redbreast; to walk alone, like that had the pestilence; to sigh, like a schoolboy that had lost his A B C; to weep . . .”

And I wept and clung to her new necklace until I fell asleep. I was awakened during the night by the sound of sap splattering against the windows. We had received a bright yellow telegram from Jane, the virgin, who swore she had been raped in a respectable bar (the Grand Monde) by three men, while eighteen people watched and did nothing. They will do nothing. Dr. R. told me, “The intellectual love of a thing is the understanding of its perfections.”

“Maybe that’s why Vally loves the smell of napalm,” I replied.

I examined Dr. R.’s white office walls, littered with: a gold-framed diploma, signed by Bay Bein; a surrealistic painting of Lowell’s Boston, with the faded yellow arches of McDonald’s shining out like the fire from a flame thrower; a light switch with the plastic figure of a car for a switch plate; and one floor-to-ceiling bookcase, full of psychiatric journals and handbooks which have led Dr. R. to believe that I could direct one of those flame throwers on his tidy office. I could, but they need them in the battle against the trees. Men are dying and I want to stop Sylvia’s heart from beating so hard to replace the blood she lost. Willow trees are creeping in from the brown river bank. (The water is now as brown as the bank, and is the texture of a rough grade oil. Our children are baptized here because we love them). The Navy will stop the
willows.

Dr. R. asks me, "Would you like to meet Jeremiah DeMoron?"
"I wish I had a McCulloch chain saw."

Dr. R's desk looks like a Japanese pillbox and as he taps his pencil on the marble desk top, I see the tracers from a machine-gun flying at me. I feel them penetrate my heart, that feeling I had when Sylvia screamed towards quiet Beirut Lane. I search for a trench to dive into . . . to die. Repetition. Jeremiah, dressed as a comanche, entered the office, hand in hand with Sylvia. Sap splattered on the window. Dr. R's slant eyes began to look like knotholes and his fingers stretched like stringy roots to shake the Comanche's hand. (It was an Indian shake.) Sylvia looked at me and her eyes flashed like a neon sign, alternately saying, "I love you," and "why did you kill that helicopter and kill those yellow children?"

1 From Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, I.v.
2 From Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona, IT.i.
3 From Spinoza, as quoted by Ezra Pound.

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Puerto Penasco

by Kevin Ault

It's not Dover Beach
but the sun fades in the west
over half a world away
And the golds and the reds
across the Pacific
are rivaled nowhere in the world

I have watched
the ebb and flow of the tide carefully
and slept soundly
to the rhythm of the waves
the ocean is a
timely and persistent friend

Somehow
in moments like these
I always think of you
your love reminds me of this scene
strikingly beautiful
and the motion and sound of the sea
are like your love
Rhythmic and dependable, slow and stately
but with latent passion
warmly, softly rocking me to sleep
The Haircut

by Jennifer Aikman

A surprise—to be sure
Being unsure
Close-cropped hair
    leaves me
Samson-like
Sapped of strength
    certainty
    self

"A lovely girl. . ."
Women are described
    not of mind
    but of body
The phrasing
    commonly, audaciously attempts
  Essence
    - not merely form

And thus I wonder—
Can "lovely" girls
Be void of tresses?
Once Upon a Christmas

by John Purcell

The rain had fallen all morning, making the road to the cemetery at Holston Ridge a sea of mud that mired the truck down to its axles. Whenever the jarring motion stopped and a whirling whine echoed through the surrounding woods, the guards would first motion at Alfred with the stocks of their rifles.

"Get off the flatbed now, Alfred. The wheels is calling your name," they said, as the other convicts laughed.

Alfred, huddled near the edge of the flatbed, would look up slowly at the guards, his gaunt face twitching around the corners of his eyes and mouth.

"You know, I was just gettin' ready to push," he said, and swung his manacled legs over the edge of the flatbed, pushing off with his belly. His feet landed wrong in the mud and he fell flat on his face. The convicts screamed with laughter.

"Somebody help poor little Alfred," one of them said, "God knows the poor bastard can't do nothin' by himself."

Trembling from the December cold, Alfred pulled himself from the thick sludge and began to force his shoulder against the rear of the truck in an awkward bobbing motion. The guards pushed a few other convicts off the truck.

"Help him out," they said, "and try not to make him look any more foolish."

Once freed, the truck rattled on up the road, grinding to a stop outside of the Sullivan County cemetery gates. The convicts crawled off the flatbed and assembled themselves in a row in front of the guards. One of them spoke.

"Can't any of you felas tell us why we's out on a work detail the day 'for Christmas? Diggin' graves ain't nothing to be doing on Christmas Eve," he said, brushing the dried mud from his pants leg.

"Don't seem like to me you got a whole lot of say in the matter. Seems like to me you oughta do as you're told and shut up about it," answered one of the guards, fingering the trigger on his rifle. "Somebody's gotta dig them graves. You ain't gonna get no grave digger to do it, not this time of year. The sooner you get 'em done, the sooner we can get outa here."

Another guard went back to the flatbed, returning with an armful of rusty shovels.

"I hear we's diggin' graves for them dead children," one of the convicts offered. "Ain't that what we's doin', Mr. Nathan?"

The guard with the rifle cleared his throat and spat on the ground. "Is that what you hear, boy? Who you been talkin' to?"

"Nobody special," the convict answered, his voice raspy. "Just talkin' 'round the yard. I just heared we was goin' to dig the graves for them children killed in that fire. Maybe I heared wrong."

"Yeah, maybe you did," the guard said. He walked closer to the convict and spoke to him in a low voice. "And maybe you oughta be a little careful about who you listen to. Sometimes things ain't meant to be heard."

The convict
stepped back away from him, nodding slightly. The other guard began handing out the shovels to every other man in the line.

"Now, then, gen-tle-men," the guard with the rifle said, "we have been ordered by the warden himself to dig four graves up along the far north ridge there before dark this evenin'. Now if you good gen-tle-men cooperates, we can get done sooner, and get outta this goddam' cold and get offa this goddam' ridge. Any of you find that unappallin'?"

A few scattered "nahs" and "uh-uh's" broke the silence. "Good," the guard continued, "cause we's aheadin' up there right now. Henry, get our good friend Alfred there to carry the lime. He can be our 'limer.'" The other guard hauled a forty pound bag of lime out of the truck and tossed it to Alfred. The bag caught him full in the chest and knocked him to the ground. They all laughed at him.

"Now Alfred," said the guard in his best schoolmaster voice, "since you's the best at mental work, we'll let you square off the graves so's we know where to dig. All you gotta do is make a line with the lime. Think you can do that?"

Alfred nodded and said, "Sure can. I've done it for years." He stood up with the bag and positioned it on his shoulder. "I dug plenty graves."

The guard stared at him. "I'm sure you have, boy." He faced the other convicts, and smiled a sick grin. "Lead the way, Alfred. We'll follow." The group watched as Alfred hobbled along the path through the cemetery gates.

As they reached the top of the north ridge, the wind became colder and made the cedars crackle in the bitter air. The guards ordered Alfred to square off four graves under a small grove of cedars, all in a row. Alfred reached into the lime bag and spread out four perfect rectangles, each the exact duplicate of the other, each spaced a proper five paces apart. After he had finished lining the last grave, he walked over and placed the bag at the feet of the guard.

"All done," Alfred said quietly as he stood in front of him. "Whatta I do now?"

The guard grabbed a shovel from one of the convicts and handed it to him. "You show us how to dig," he said.

Alfred took the shovel and walked to where he had outlined the final grave. Laboriously he began to chop off sections of turf with his shovel and toss them to the side.

"What the hell ya watchin' for," the guard yelled at the convicts. "If a gimp like him can dig that good, it shouldn't be no problem for the rest of ya. Get to work!"

The convicts dug at the graves until long shadows passed across the ridge from an encroaching storm. Alfred had dug at least six feet down now, and stood at the bottom of the grave while he worked to smooth the walls down with his shovel. Overhead the skies darkened as the howl from the wind blocked out the sound from the other convicts. He felt the single cold raindrops begin to sting the back of his neck more and more frequently until suddenly the sky opened a flow of ice-cold rain on him. He heard the guards' cries of "Get out of the graves," but the downpour made the walls of the grave so slippery he had difficulty getting a foothold, even with the shovel. By now the sky was so dark that he couldn't see out of the grave and he screamed for someone to help him. But his frail voice couldn't be heard over the roar of the storm. As he made one final attempt to get out, he sensed that the walls were beginning to crumble around him. Terrified, he began to scramble madly at one wall while the other slowly oozed around his ankles,
locking him in place. He tried to squirm loose, but a heavy slab of dirt fell on his hip and pinned him down. A long, agonized wall escaped from his throat as the mud slowly covered him over.

Above, the guards yelled for the convicts to cover the graves with canvas tarpins, shouting for the men to line up so they could begin the descent down the hill. One of the guards realized that Alfred was missing and ran over to the grave. By this time Alfred had been completely covered by the collapsing walls so that in the darkness the grave appeared empty. The guard shouted to his companion.

"Henry! Alfred ain't here! I can't find him."

"Whatta you mean, you can't find him?" the other screamed, waving his rifle furiously in the downpour. "He's in the grave!"

"Nah, he ain't in here, I tell ya," said the first guard, "he musta got out."

The downpour increased, falling so heavy that it formed small streams around the guard's feet.

"Christ, it don't matter anymore," the other guard yelled. "We just gotta get outta here now or we ain't never gonna get that truck back to the prison. We'll come back and find that gimp later. He can't go far."

The guard with the rifle motioned for the line of prisoners to move forward. The group fled quickly down the hill as the winds roared through the pines overhead.

Alone in the grave, Alfred found that he was quickly suffocating from the mud creeping into his nostrils. He felt the mud constricting around his body like some boa squeezing the lifeblood out of him. Violently he wriggled his body, twisting his limbs this way and that to try and weaken the bond of heavy earth. He rotated his head as if he were a blind worm working his way to the surface, feeling with his nose, filled with fetid odor of the clinging mud. Finally his face broke through. Next his shoulders shook loose, followed by his arms and shortly thereafter, his hands. With them loose, he was able to dig out his hips and legs, and with much difficulty, he managed to stand.

The rain had ceased, and the air had become much colder. A few solitary stars appeared through the clouds above, flickering brightly. For a moment Alfred stood in utter amazement, because he felt as if God had given him rebirth from the grave so that he might fulfill some mighty purpose. Never before in his life had he felt that his existence had meaning, but now he knew it with a certainty that transcended all understanding. God would not have saved me from this grave, Alfred thought, unless he had planned some wonderful things for my life.

With a new-found strength, he dug out the half-buried shovel and stuck it deep into one of the more sturdy walls of the grave. Using it as a stand, he crawled onto it and hoisted himself up over the edge of the hole. Once out, he kneeled in front of the grave and prayed.

"Heavenly father," he whispered, "who has carried me from my grave and freed my soul from bondage. I thank you."

At that moment Alfred looked up, and it finally dawned on him that he was alone. Not only had God freed him from the grave, but he had freed him from prison as well! He struggled up from his knees and shouted to the heavens.

"God, I am free now! I am finally free!" He stared at the foreboding blackness of the woods, through which he could see the distant lights of Trubury, a small town about a mile and a half away. The light seemed to him an oracle, a shining beacon calling him forth to perform miracles, just like Jesus had done. And why not? Hadn't both he and Jesus been raised from the dead? Hadn't both he and Jesus been reviled and persecuted? Alfred began to shake spasmodically from the cold, his mind racing from inference to
As his vision blossomed, he muffled an almost hysterical laugh, as much from some perverted joy as from unearthly fear. His realization was complete. He was the Christ! All his life he had wondered why he had suffered so, why he had been born deformed, why he had no father. God was his father! All of the pain had been nothing but a trial. And he was victorious!

"Hosannah!" cried Alfred to the darkness. "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!" He fell on his knees again, his arms stretched out in supplication to the heavens. "My father," he wept, "my father, your will be done."

A wind stirred the pines, and he was certain that the groaning of the limbs carried the voice of God. Over and over he heard them creak, "Go, go, go." And from that instant, he knew what his Father wanted him to do.

"Yes, yes," said Alfred, "I will go to Trubury, and proclaim Your glory. On this most holiest of nights, I will go to Trubury and tell them that Jesus is born—in me! Thy will be done!" Vaulting clumsily off his knees, he crawled across the muddy ground and pulled himself up by a cedar branch. Frantically he scuttled down the hill toward the sleeping town of Trubury.

Trubury lay stiller that night than had the town of Bethlehem so many centuries before it. The sky had begun to cloud over again and a soft dusting of snow drifted down upon the streets, the occasional breeze making the flakes dance about in spinning wind-devils under the streetlights. Alfred was trudging through a near-by field, one that sat behind the First Evangelical Episcopalian Church, singing Christmas carols in his rough, off-key voice. Upon reaching the locked front doors of the church, he noticed that the custodian had left open a small basement window to the left of the steps. He got down on his hands and knees and, forcing the window open wide enough to enable his body to pass through, crawled into the basement room.

Down in the basement was a storehouse for the church, containing stacks of hymnals, classroom chalkboards, folded chairs, and in the corner, a large stack of robes. Still trembling from the bone-numbing cold, Alfred walked over to the corner and picked up one of the robes. It was obviously a costume from a passion play of sorts; it was a long, flowing red robe with a golden-tasseled cord around the waist, a regal robe worthy only of a man of great stature. Underneath the robe sat a long, straight white beard with little hooks that fit around the ears. Alfred let out a cry of delight and immediately put on the beard and slipped on the robe, which bunched around his ankles because of its great length, causing the border of the robe to drag along the ground like a royal train. Now he felt he truly looked the role of messiah. Now he was truly ready to march through the streets of Trubury and proclaim the good news of his coming to the world. Their Redeemer had returned!

Struggling back out through the basement window, Alfred headed down the sidestreet where the church was located to the main street of the town, singing every Christmas hymn he knew. Lights in the houses went on, dogs barked at him, people yelled "Shut up!" at him from their bedroom windows, but on he sang, punctuating the end of each song with the declaration, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" His uneven gait made many people presume him drunk, and they greeted him with cries of "Drink a toast for me, St. Nick" as he passed.

Having reached the end of town, he sat down on the curb and rested. There, across the street from him, stood the Bollingbrook Children's Home, where he had spent a good part of his childhood accepting scorn and ridicule. Part of the upper floor appeared to have been damaged by fire. Alfred recognized immediately the cause of the fire—God's wrath. Yes, thought Alfred, the sins of fathers visited on the children, so be it. And then,
shivering in the chilling night air, he understood. He knew the reason they had to dig the graves. For the children who died, didn’t the man say? In the fire? A faint wave of pity washed over him, and grew, until he was overwhelmed with the sorrow of it. But in that sorrow an idea cut through, an idea that glowed in his forehead somewhere behind his eyes like a bright coal.

“Father,” whispered Alfred, “give me your strength. Give me your strength to raise them children from the dead. I have suffered for this, Father. You know how I have suffered. Glorify me now, Lord. Glorify me in front of them people, so’s they’ll know I’m your son.” He knelt in front of a fire hydrant and repeated the words, “Please, father” for a few minutes; then, with a new sense of resolve, he rose and walked across the street to the home.

From a bedroom window, two of the children in the orphanage saw Alfred nearing the front door. One of the children ran screaming “Santa Claus, Santa Claus!” down the hall corridor, waking the other children and Mrs. Aster, the home guardian. She grabbed the little boy by the waist and shook him.

“What’s gotten into you, Jimmy? Is this some kind of a joke?”

“No, Mrs. Aster,” Jimmy said breathlessly, “I saw him.”

“Don’t you lie to me now,” she said, sticking her stern gray face a few inches away from his, “or I’ll wallop you good.”

“It ain’t no lie, ma’am,” he said, his excitement brought down by the tightening grip she had on his shoulder.

At that moment, a loud pounding sound rang through the house.

“That’s him now,” Jimmy said, “I know it is!”

“It ain’t nothin’ of the kind,” she answered, “now get back into bed.”

Jimmy, and the other children who were carefully peeking out the doors of their rooms, followed Mrs. Aster’s instructions until she turned and headed for the door. Then they quietly followed her.

When she answered the door, Alfred burst into the room, pushing her aside. “Woman,” he said loudly, “before you see your salvation!” The children giggled softly behind her.

“You get outa here right now or I’m calling the police,” Mrs. Aster hissed at him. “And you,” she said, turning to the children behind her back, “get to bed, or there’s gonna be hell to pay.”

“Woman,” he continued, “the kingdom of hell is within you.” The children giggled again. “And don’t you yell at them children. Didn’t I once say, let the little ones come to me?”

“Such blasphemous talk,” she said, “to be talkin’ in front of the children. You ain’t Jesus. And on Christmas. I’m calling the police!” She turned to walk away.

He grabbed her by the arm, “Woman, you don’t understand, do you? I come to raise the dead.”

She looked at him fearfully. “You’re a crazy man. You burst in here in them funny clothes, and say hurtful things about the children, God rest ‘em. You’re a crazy man!” She struggled to release herself from his grip.

“Tell the children I have a story to tell them, my story, the story of the new Jesus,” Alfred said, his body trembling with emotion.

“Are you Santa Claus?” asked Jimmy, peering around the parlour curtains.

“He ain’t Santa Claus, he ain’t Jesus, he ain’t nothing,” screamed Mrs. Aster, “he’s just a dirty old crazy man!”

Alfred yanked Mrs. Aster toward him, chocking her with the crook of his arm.

“Now, children,” he said, his breathing heavy with each word, “I’ll tell you a story. Once upon a Christmas the Son of God was raised from his grave to give God honor. Before he died he was a cripple, a nothing.” He eyed Mrs.
Aster furiously, "but after God raised him from the dead, he adopted him as His Son." The room was silent except for the monotonous sound of a grandfather clock. Alfred's face beamed brightly.

"I am that Son. I can raise them children who died here from the dead."

"It's a lie," Mrs. Aster said, "a filthy lie!" She wrenched herself free from his grip and ran out the door screaming for help.

"Come, children," Alfred said, "let's go and do God's will." He walked slowly out the door and across the lawn. Mrs. Aster had managed to wake a neighbor who accompanied her back to the house with a shotgun.

"There, that's him," she said frantically, "that's him. He's the crazy man who assaulted me."

"Don't try to go anywhere," the neighbor said, "or you'll be sorry."

Alfred walked directly toward the man with the gun.

"You better stop, mister, or I'll shoot you," the man said, "I swear to God I will."

"You swear to me?" Alfred smiled, and reached forward to grab the barrels of the shotgun. The blast from it blew off his face, and his body flew through the air like an unstrung marionette.

"Jesus Christ," the man said, his hands shaking, his eyes glazed, "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ."

"He said he could raise them children, them poor dead children. But it was a lie, a stinking lie." She became hysterical. "He couldn't raise them children, nobody can, nobody. . ." Her words broke off into a muffled sob.

A small voice came from behind her. "Mrs. Aster...

She turned quickly to see a young boy standing behind her. His eyes searched her with all the hurt of innocence betrayed.

"Why wouldn't you let him try," he said.

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The Non-Sexist Traffic Jam

by Beth Hampton

"Move your car or I'll move it for you!" the angry person depersoned. "You have awful personners, young person," exclaimed the grey-headed old person. "Why don't you try to be a little more hiperson," it added. "Oh, shut up and mind your own business," was the angry young person's counter person. The person in the stalled car got out and said, "I think there's something wrong with the personfold." "Is this car personal?" asked the angry person. "No," said the person with the stalled car. "It's automatic."

"Well, we'd better move this car before traffic gets even worse," whined the angry person. It picked up the car and moved it to the side of the road. "Wow, did you see that?" exclaimed the person from the stalled car. "That person is a hiperson. It must take vitapersons!" "What are you babbling about?" said the old grey-headed person. "That person just picked up my car and moved it," said the person from the stalled car, excitedly. "Didn't you see it?" "No," responded the old grey-headed person. "I think you're full of personure."
Graffiti
by Patricia Homeier

What were they thinking when they carved words in the desk?
Did it make them immortal
SIGMA NU
JOE DUNLAP
YAWN
BUTLER OF INDPLS.
CAN'T GO TKE GO HOME
until the next ink pens and pocket knives came along?
Were they struggling through Calculus or daydreaming in
Sociology? Were they in love
ALFONSE LIVES!
DELTA GAMMA
YAWN
FOOD
OBSCURED CLOUDS
with anyone or anything in particular? Were they looking
past college to graduation, past graduation to
PABLO
SIGMA RHO DELTA
LIZANN
PINK FLOYD
J.W.
life? What are they doing now? Carrying a gun?
Wearing a three-piece suit? Feeding a child?
UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY
PI BETA PHI
DICK
LOYOLA OF CHICAGO
MIXED NUTS
Did they understand what their own words meant to them?
WHAT A LONG STRANGE TRIP IT'S BEEN
Do they know what their words mean now?
Alfred

by Patricia Homeier

He'll don a hat, then *Time* and smile in hand
Head down to eat, observe, too loudly laugh—
No sense in caring what small others think,
He'll turn the page, then murmur "derelict."

Back in the makeshift darkroom he'll appear
Along with black-and-whites from murky pans
The photographs, enclosed in cards then mailed,
Have helped begin a friendship, warm cold hearts.

As friendships go, he offers all he is—
And satisfied with nothing less he'll push
Until he's scraped your soul, pried loose your dreams
He doesn't stop with looking—got to touch.
At every turn
a babe

The supermarket overflows
some carts boast two or three
reaching for the artichokes
wailing when ignored
The Fates are not fair

At home—
The gifts received in joy
now torment
Nonetheless—the books, the bottles
are put away (not returned)
for Later
(Hope triumphant over Fear)

But for Now
Her body, primed to nurture,
is strangely vacant
strangely alone
“All dressed up
with no place to go,” says she
“Womb for rent;”
says he
they laugh
till they cry

And the maddening
forever-on confusion
“Our first child...”
What is meant:
The future one that lives
or this one
that did not?
3:03. 3:03 on a night that had been without sleep. A night when her mind had counted the seconds, the minutes and the hours while waiting for dawn and then daylight. She yearned for the light of the morning in order to join the world of... normality. Yet the minutes merely faltered along as she had watched the late show, the fuzz on the TV, the numbers on the clock, the shadows on the walls, and the movement of Eric's chest.

In twelve hours she would be at the Deli. She would be taking orders then filling them. It was a slot in her life. She would file away those hours of her time—her life in that thoughtless routine. And perhaps, years from now, on some other sleepless night, a face from the confused jumble would rise up to tease her memory: the fat cook with the hairy armpits; the gay lovers/busboys; the bleary-eyed Jewish owner; the dead flies entombed in the age-stained light globes. The bustle and headaches of a long day spent on her feet—first dancing and then standing.

The prismatic quality of the mind at those late hours-of-the-night/early-hours-of-the-morning greatly intrigued her. As she would lie on the bed, her mind would become like a flashlight in the darkness. It would explore the seconds passing, the failures of yesterday, the promises of tomorrow. It would open long-locked trunks to rediscover her hopes, fears, and secrets. It would... but she was now so tired of thinking.

3:40. She was also tired of lying in the bed. She was tired of turning from one side to another; she was bored with staring at the ceiling. Curling up next to Eric and closing her eyes, she tried to clear her mind. But her mind was much too busy. She moved away from Eric to her own now cold half of the mattress and watched the shadows chase one another across the ceiling.

4:03. She would now get up. Her mind was eager to leave the bed, but her body was reluctant. It savored the warmth of the comforter, the softness of the bed and the closeness of Eric's body. But, she took courage. Pushing the comforter down and away, she sat up. Upon standing, she gathered up the sheet that had somehow, sometime in the night, become entangled about her legs. As her body moved out of its warm niche, Eric's rolled over and laid selfish claim to the entirety of the mattress. There was no returning now. She looked down at the beautiful, sleeping Eric and wished she were there dreaming with him. She wished she were fast asleep with his arms around her. But, she was not—soon it would be morning. And now, she was standing naked, one foot near the alarm clock and the other by the train of the pink and purple tie-dyed sheet, on a hard wood floor.

A draft followed by a slight shiver prompted her to improvise a toga-like wrap with the sheet. "How chid!" How dreadfully cold. A full length, long sleeve, high collar robe was what she longed for at that moment. "Tacky," Eric would have commented, but now, in the emptiness and darkness of the room, he wouldn't know—couldn't see any of her desires. So she could wish
for whatever she wanted. And now, now she wanted a Sears, powder blue, fake fur robe. "So there, Eric!" Actually, at that moment, deep down inside, she wished for anything which would envelop her body, would ward off the penetrating chill. However, she had nothing but her secret desire and a frayed sheet. "Such is life."

"Such is life." Lately, those words had not worked as they once had. They no longer obliterated the problems nor lessened the strains. "We don’t have the rent money." "We’ll have to hitchhike home for X-mas." "The show closed after only four days." "My purse was stolen." Such is life? To quote some young prophet of the subway station, "Life sucks!"


There was no furniture in the room except for the large mattress, some shelves, a dresser and a lounge chair. At some party or other (God knows they went to them all), Eric had referred to it as “the giant empty room full of junk.” If the label fits...Often, she would look around the room and then, still wickedly giggling, ask Eric, “What would my mother say if she saw it?” Eric had always seemed too interested in other things (his plays, his openings, his closings, his appetites) to answer her.

So, on this wintery morning at 4:30 a.m., she forged her way through the litter on the cold, slick floor to the single window at the end of this giant room. The tacked-up sheet covering the window matched the sheet covering her body. How intriguing. Symbolism? Both covered bare, stark reality, didn’t they? The world. The nude, human body. Perhaps. She didn’t know.

What did she know at 4:35 after a night of contemplation, a night without sleep? Many things. In fact, she had made a list in her mind as she touched on each during the course of her inner conversations—her cruel examinations. Unemployment. Dancing. The theatre. New York City. Waitressing. Men. Sex. Her mother. etc... And the flip side of the question? What didn’t she know about? Her fears for one. What made her eat an entire bag of cookies and then stick her fingers down her throat? Also, she continually, perpetually wondered about her lovely one sleeping on the mattress in the shadows of the room. Why him? Why him with the body of a god, the mind of a poet and the disposition of a sick parrot. She didn’t know. And, for the last week she had asked herself where the rent money was coming from. (“From the gods,” Eric would say.) But that was such a temporary question—one that came and went with fortune or misfortune. The biggles always stayed around. Questions like, what did she want out of life?

What did she want out of life? This last question had taxed her mind many times during the long night before this cold morning. For what does one think about on restless nights after the TV stations sign off with “O say can you see...” and the noisy trucks have stopped their nighttime deliveries? How about...being twenty-seven and not being married. Or, what was worse, being twenty-seven and not really wanting to be married. How about giving it all up and returning home, or cashing it all in and going on tour. How about... more sleepless nights and cold mornings.

She pushed aside one edge of the curtain. The brightness of the streetlamp slanted across the room causing Eric to groan and then roll over. She pushed the curtain farther so that the whole room glowed with the yellow white light. Eric continued, face in the pillow, to breathe deeply. Across from her were other dirt streaked windows and below her was an empty, grimy street. Litter-filled gutter. Overturned garbage cans. So much for the beauty of it all.
Catty-corner from her, a parking lot was spotlighted by the streetlamp. One portion of the wall next to the parking lot was covered by an enormous sign: BRIAN'S TRUCK RENTALS—WE TAKE YOU ANYWHERE FOR LESS. Red letters on a grey wall over a black-top lot. She let the curtain fall over the scene in order to close out the grotesque play between the glow of the lights and the city. She wanted to blot out those other dirty windows, the car lot, the bleak streets, the hostile people, the late buses. She couldn't face it now, not now under the selectiveness of the yellow-white lights. She would rather look at it with her hardened, hurried, morning eyes. It always looked better in the morning. It was less frightening. Or maybe, she could simply ignore it all in the morning. For now, the ugliness of the city seemed like some cruel prank or the sudden appearance of an evil-faced clown—a jester—a prankster.... Mardi Gras.

Once they, Eric and she, had gone to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. They had spent three whole days laughing. Joyful, happy laughter. They had laughed at the holes in the bathroom walls, at the creaky springs of the old bed, at the crowds in the streets and at each other. A few days held in time. She could still smell the fried doughnuts they'd feasted on in the hidden courtyard. She could hear the staccato taps of the young black boy who danced in the street between the competitive clash of two Jazz bands. And she could still clearly see in her mind the drunken, laughing Eric stumbling through the streets after the floats. Arms held up, he begged for trinkets, and eager to please him, a multi-colored jester, the queens and kings showered him with doubloons, necklaces, baubles. For each necklace he put around her neck he had placed a kiss on her face, ear, nose. Then holding hands and laughing, they'd walked down Bourbon Street to the hotel. That night the old four poster bed had joined in their mirth, laughing—laughing until dawn.

Bits and pieces. Dabs of thoughts like the smears on her windows. And yet each added up to compile some sort of whole—the connecting of the good times and the bridging over of the bitter.

Again she crossed the vastness of the room, while sweeping up with the trailing end of her sheet dust, dirt and loose papers. She stooped to rescue two remaining pieces of pizza (cheese, black olives, onions and mushrooms) from a grease-soaked box. One she ate slowly as she walked toward the kitchen, while the other she held securely in her palm until she found the tabletop in the darkness. She shut the door and flipped on the light. The old fluorescent tube took a moment to crackle to life. The second it ignited, a small company of cockroaches froze in surprise and then exited right and left into the cracks along the floorboards. She didn't bother with them any longer. They were now permanent residents. At first she had diligently cleaned to get rid of them, but soon she realized that they weren't critics of her lifestyle. They were an intrinsic part of the building like the loud pipes, cold water and endless flights of stairs. At least they had the decency to be out of her way in the morning. Besides, wasn't this all supposed to be temporary? The apartment? The Deli? and even Eric? Wasn't that how she had planned it? But now, who knew, so why should she wonder? What was the point?

She licked the congealed, clumpy tomato sauce from her fingers and then looked down at the second piece lying on the white enamel table. She laughed out loud. "Still life of a piece of pizza." A lonely piece of pizza from Frank's resting next to a tacky glass butter dish that was brimming over with Sweet-n-Low. Next to this was a carafe they had lifted from some restaurant, a vessel which contained wilted flowers that she had bought from a homely Moonie. How ludicrous. But then, weren't most things ludicrous at 5:00 a.m.?
Didn't most serious endeavors somehow seem silly? Didn't most worries seem pointless? Yes. Of course, yes. So where did that leave her? Simply examining her life, contemplating a piece of pizza, and craving a cigarette.

With the sheet tucked around her feet, she sat cross-legged on the chair like some monk in meditation and ate the second piece. The heavy, greasy triangle completely held her attention. But when she was finished and her hand was empty, she felt cheated; she wanted to continue chewing and swallowing in a hypnotic cadence. Stop it! She wanted to be strict with herself. Her creed had always been diet, diet, diet! She didn't want to think about food. She didn't want to need food. "A dancer must be thin." Yet she couldn't help it; the need was overwhelming her. She had opened Pandora's box and the wickedness of it all—the self abuse—was somehow inviting. With a spoon she scraped around the sides of the peanut butter jar until she had a small, creamy mound. She was absorbed by it—transformed. From a tall box she picked out the fat, black raisins individually and slowly nibbed then chewed each one. She savored their sweetness. Five, ten, twenty. Stop it!

She picked up the pack of cigarettes lying on the counter. She was now smoking a pack a day. "Ladies don't smoke." That was one of her mother's favorite comments. "Ladies" also didn't swear in public, drink to excess, talk too loudly, or engage in premarital sex. But first on her mother's list of "no-no's" was living with a man, especially a man of a different religion. Looking down at her cigarette, she thought, "What a bad, bad girl I am—what a rotten, lousy daughter." At least Mother had big brother Joseph to comfort her with the trappings of respectability. Joseph was now a big-time lawyer in Louisville. He had a placid wife, two lovely babies and an imposing house that bordered Cherokee Park. He also had Mother and Father over for dinner every Sunday evening. Brownie points. And Ruth, sweet, plump, Ruth, would
graciously smile at her in-laws while serving her incredible breads and pies. The perfect family living the ideal life.

She stubbed out her cigarette. She could imagine her mother saying to the other women at the Louisville Ballet Board luncheon over their creamcheese finger sandwiches. "Yes, Joseph and Ruth are doing well—we’re so proud of him. And the babies—my how they’ve grown!...My daughter? My baby’s still in New York City,... Yes, she still wants to perform, but it’s such a competitive field. I just don’t know. Saul and I want her to come home—we’re not getting any younger you know and she’s our youngest. But these children—they have to “find” themselves....No. No serious young man yet. She still sees that...writer, but nothing will come of that. I know my little girl. He’s too serious for her—much too quiet for our little bit of sunshine."

Slowly her craving for food—for some type of comfort or security, she supposed—passed; and she picked up a wrinkled script from one of the chairs. It was undoubtedly another play by one of Eric’s weird, but immensely talented friends. The play would open for two nights in the basement of some porno place. The critics and the audience (if there were one) wouldn’t understand it, but the playwright and Eric would love it. She sometimes wondered about him. No, correction, she always wondered about him. What did he see in her? Did he really love her? And, how deep was his love for her? He was always analyzing, measuring and dissecting plays, movies, and books, but how could she ask him to sound the depth of his love? She was afraid to ask.

Once, several years before, in those days when she had wanted to get married and had thought of nothing else, he had betrayed her. They had been walking through some mall and he, interrupting her chatter, had said, "Quick, look over at that window."

She had turned toward the jewelry store display and gazed at the watches, rings, and pendants. Puzzled, she turned back to him.

With a laugh he taunted, "Now you can’t tell your Mom that we haven’t looked at rings."

She had never again mentioned a permanent relationship to him. And a few weeks after that incident she had informed her mother that they were planning to live together. It was to be a temporary arrangement until each wanted to go their own way. It was a compromise that almost killed her mother. Yet, weren’t there compromises in everything? Didn’t compromises help hold two people like them together?

What did bind them together? What was it—that thing that helped them tolerate it all? Love? Lust? Jealousy? Or was it merely...curiosity? The wonderings: what does he feel?...how will he react? The exciting and dangerous clash of two separate and unique wills in an ambiguous situation? Was it the intricate working out of the reactions...and the compromises? Both of them always teetering precariously, yet regaining their balance at that last possible second. But wouldn’t that get old some day? How many times can two people fight about breakfast cereal, toilet seats, and cab fare without life becoming one intolerable battle? And, if two people always seemed to be against each other, how could they join forces when it really mattered? How? What? Where? Questions. All those questions that slyly, continuously attacked her mind on those sleepless nights.

Her thoughts were like rocks skipping over a pool—merely touching the surfaces briefly, spreading out and then moving on. But a stone had to stop sometime. It had to sink to the bottom and lie there. She got up, turned off the light, and opened the door. The roaches could have their stage back. They could quietly munch at the scraps off the green and cream swirled floor.
She didn't really care. At least they didn't grate at the nerves like the squeals of the baby next door. At least they didn't affront her body like the cold showers. They were a quiet insignificant annoyance in a life brimming with annoyances: late rehearsals, early classes, complaining customers, and long nights.

Now unaccustomed to the darkness, she teetered through the obstacle course to the bathroom. She looked back at the illuminated dial of the clock on the floor. 5:03. She could now take a shower; she could now make a pretense of preparing to meet the day.

She stepped inside the bathroom and turned on the light. This room was her one creative highlight in the dump of an apartment. When they had first moved in, it had been a baroque nightmare. The huge lavender tub/shower, the enormous lavender toilet, the black and white wallpaper covered with fat, naked nymphs, had all been an insult to taste. While Eric had spent the first hot month in the city reading, eating, sweating and complaining, she had sat with a determined intensity for hours and hours painting the walls and woodwork. At all hours of the night she had listened to the radio and the slap-slap of her brush. Each panel, each curve, each surface she had covered herself. Of course, Eric had thought it crazy to put so much effort into something that was to be only temporary.

She pulled down the web of dingy tights and shapeless leotards from the towel rack above the tub. Bunched in a ball, they went out the door and landed near the bed. She then walked over to the sink. The mirror above it reflected a strange, vulnerable face. She was glad that she looked like this only in the morning—only for herself and for Eric. How humiliating it would be to look ten years old at a rehearsal or an audition. She had no eyelashes and her face had no color or shape. And she really didn't approve of her nose.

The list of complaints were all so much easier to accept now. She once assumed everything would get easier as she got older, but somehow it didn't. She only got slower. Her kicks weren't as high. The days seemed longer. The buses fuller. According to Eric, "Life is a Bitch," and sometimes, now, she agreed.

She remembered their conversation the morning before this long sleepless night.

"Eric, let's go to my house this year for Christmas."

"No." Nothing more. He didn't even look up from his papers or stop shoveling Captain Crunch into his mouth.

"Why not? Eric, please. Mom would love to see us." Then she had changed her tone. She would be assertive. "Eric, I want to go home. I haven't seen my parents for the longest time. You know they would love to see us."

"No, they wouldn't love to see us." He still didn't look up. "Your mother would love to see you, so you go alone. She COULDN'T care less about me. The only way that the JAP queen would blink her eyes at me is if I left you or..." A small laugh, "if I married you. Which, in either case, I'd be a bastard."

The same old story: "No one's good enough for our little girl." Maybe they didn't really approve of Eric, but they tried to get along with him. They were pleasant, friendly and enthusiastic about his work. ("So Eric, tell us about your new play. Our little girl tells us that...") But he didn't try; he was so cold to them, so aloof and superior.

"I think you have a definite attitude problem." He looked up at her, shrugged his shoulders and then, ignoring her, returned to his script.

What should she do? Should she ignore him? Should she get angry? Should she reason? But she did nothing as the minutes of indecision passed. She simply got up, cleared away the dishes, and washed them while silently
reproaching herself. For some reason she always seemed to lose whenever an issue was at stake. Why couldn't she ever win with him? Why couldn't she stick up for herself?

She stopped looking into the mirror and quickly finished brushing her teeth. As she loosened one edge, the draped sheet fell away from her hard-muscled body. Now for the supreme test. Did she have the courage to step on the scales? She advanced two steps, backed away one, advanced another, and then stopped. An awkward waltz of indecision and fear. No, she decided, not this morning. This was not a good day to trust Providence or her metabolism or even her kidneys. She would wait till tomorrow. So there, Eric. He would laugh at her if he could see her now. Afraid of the scales. He often claimed that she was afraid of life. She would answer that she was afraid only of self-disgust. And then they would argue. Trying in his infinite understanding to devalue her fears and belittle her systems of sanity, he would follow her around the apartment until she angrily walked out the door.

She stepped into the shower and turned the knobs. For once the water was not merely warm; it was hot and soothing. She stood directly under the faucet. First hitting the top of her head, the water ran down her forehead, over her closed eyes, around her nose, and then it tumbled over her breasts. The water cascaded down her back. Chasing away the thoughts from her mind and the stiffness from her body, it seeped into every pore. Seduced, she stood there for seconds, then minutes. Once the water had lost some of its warmth, she hurriedly shampooed her hair, shaved her underarms and legs, then rinsed the soap from her body. Out she stepped from the slippery shower into the steamy room.

In the next room her alarm went off. Obnoxiously, it blipped for an unbearably long time in the stillness of the apartment before Eric groaned and fumbled across the mattress.

It was now 6:15: time for her actions to take on a legitimacy and a certain economy. She plugged in the yellow dryer and then pointed the nozzle towards her long blonde hair. Methodically she dried the front, sides and top. She flipped the whole mass over her head and dried the underneath. Quickly and nimbly from long practice, her fingers formed a long braid which she fastened into a high bun. Next, with makeup, she carefully transformed her little girl's face into the face of a woman.

Naked and shivering, she walked out of the bathroom. Picking up her duffle bag from the floor by the bathroom door, she crossed over to the bed and recovered the discarded tights and leotards. The entire collection went in the canvas bag.

It suddenly occurred to her that she didn't want to dance that morning. She didn't want to go to her class or to the audition. She didn't want to confront a sea of unsympathetic faces. She simply wanted to creep away to some hidden corner with a book for one entire lazy, selfish day. Once, long ago at a small eastern college, she had read volume after volume of cummings, Millay and Moore. Then, she had read all of her favorites to Eric. But he had wanted her to be his audience. She had been expected and commanded to be his ever patient and pliable audience (“bravo, bravol”). She was his sidekick then—a mere decoration in his life. Yet she had known that when she had first decided to hook up with him. She had realized what she was in for.

She walked over to the closet, opened the door, and then bent down to sort through the clothes strewn on the floor. Where in the hell was a clean pair of jeans? A semi-clean pair? Okay, anything as long as it didn't smell. It was time to do the wash again, the clothes were seeping out of the closet, but no way in hell was she going to tackle the job. She had lugged the basket two
blocks to the laundromat the weekend before. She was not his maid. A mental image of her mother came to her. Vividly she saw her mother, this gray-haired woman, frantically following her husband around the house, picking up his clothes, wiping up his messes, smoothing-over his life. An urge to pick up the pile from the floor and throw it on the innocent sleeper overwhelmed her. But while she was struggling to gather up the clothes, she found her Levi’s. So much for temptation. And now she was running late. She crossed the room to the single set of drawers. Underwear, a pair of socks, a thick sweater—she stood fully dressed, but she was still cold. “Such is life.”

She still didn’t want to leave. She wanted to go over to Eric; she wanted to lie down beside him and tease him: “Hey you sleaze bag, wake up!” But she couldn’t. She was afraid of life’s little rejections.

Once he had actually left her. He had walked out of the apartment and out of her life for two months. They fought constantly throughout the beginning of that humid summer. Every moment spent together had been a battle of wills or wits. Finally, he said, “No more.” With a suitcase of manuscripts in one hand and a grocery sack of clothes in the other, he had stepped out the door to leave the giant room even emptier. At first she was numbed by anger, but then came the grief. Chain-smoking, she spent hot, sweaty nights in front of the television. She lost twelve pounds in two weeks, then gained twenty. Her dancing suffered; she suffered. On sleepless nights, her solace was in the company of cockroaches as she finished off large pizzas.

They met again at the end of that summer. From across the room, through the small groups of people at a party, the still-existing ties pulled them together. Underneath all the pain, she had known that those invisible threads could not be so easily snipped away. There, in that mirror-walled room, she had wanted to be “cool;” she had wanted to ignore him or to hide in some cluster of babbling voices. But, instead of escaping him, she had looked across the room at him with her round, brown eyes.

“Hi, Eric. How’s it going?”

“Fine. Just....fine. The play’s coming along great. We open next week and,” a small self-conscious laugh, “this time John bets that we’ll stay open for longer than a week.”

She remained pathetically serious, “Great. I’m happy....excited for you.”

“How are you getting along?”

“Fine. Just....fine.”

Now, she didn’t quite remember exactly what they talked about; however, she knew that at some point in their conversation she had asked him, no, begged him to return to her. Offering her then voluptuous, barely covered body, she had pleaded with him to return to their giant room and large mattress. And he had returned.

Still there were times that she was so afraid. She was terrified that once again he would walk out the door to leave her to the loneliness. For now, he had become part of that intricate weave, forming self. And yet, weren’t they only supposed to be temporary? Wasn’t that how they had originally planned it?

She put on her watch and grabbed her keys from the dresser top. It was time for her to leave, but she continued to linger. She walked over to the mattress and reset the clock for Eric. Looking down at his sleeping form, she savored his beauty. Many a morning she would remain in bed simply staring at his face. With a feather-light touch she would trace his full, dark lips. During those instances she would often think to herself, “After five years together, working together, living together, eating together, and sleeping together, I don’t really know this man.” But how could she ever really know him? And
what could she know? Relived moments. Pieces of conversations. Memories of shared laughter and anger. How could she make sense of it all? How could she collect it and hold it up for inspection during the middle of the night—search for the cohesive that held it all together for her? Love? What else...why else? Without that, it would all be so impossible...so unbearable. It would really be temporary.

She glanced at the clock and then gently kissed Eric's forehead. Now was not the time for contemplation; now was the time to pull on her boots and catch her bus.

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**Free, Young Lust**

*by M. Farinas*

Living like the devil
Looking like an angel
I have bilateral symmetry but not really
An illegal alien crossing the border
   But just who am I?
Talking Heads or Talking Friends
What the Fuck's the difference?
Psychology or physiology
I love her personality
But I love her physically two
Sometimes similar but often not alike
However, physically seems like nerfs hitting my brain
   But nerf balls, pink erasers, and grapefruits; I love these more
Space shuttles running from Earth to the cosmos
Like the brain patterns moving through the electric fields of my brain
Partying, dancing, or just frustration
Looking for the girl with a yellow sweater
Hey! look I'm just really pissed off
I'm just off the wall
Or is my mind being barbed wired within certain limits
   Looking for dope in my plasma
Freedom to choose or Freedom to be
It's just a quick means to an end
Perfection

by Sarah Hill

There is an ideal of corn
a perfection of hog
that grows tall and green
long and fat
and hangs heavy with its ripeness.

Standing by the drought-brown stalks
with the withered hands
there is a sign,
over the ribby pigs
shaking in the dust
there is a sign,
and when the farmer sails
and the markets rise
and the couple down the street goes meatless,
and it promises cool rain in April
and hogs rolling fat
in the mud.
Nancy filed onto the bus with the rest of the fifth graders, bag lunch in one hand and her least favorite article of clothing in the other hand. Her mom always made her carry her light grey, cardigan sweater everywhere, because she said that drafts create colds. Usually when mothers get chilly, they act as temperature gauges for their daughters and make them apply an additional layer of clothing.

Besides the bag lunch and the unwanted sweater, her knee-socks were not cooperating at all. They had been borrowed from her sister who was known as the household elastic killer. The stretchy-stuff was definitely dead in these socks which were a grimy pink color, compliments of the old washer in the basement that altered garment color with each washing.

Wondering if the contents of her bagged lunch were going to be as rotten as the first part of her day had been, Nancy peeked inside the bag. A summer-sausage sandwich with butter, a few generic corn chips and one of those tiny candy bars the company labeled as "fun-sized," were available within the confines of her paper sack. Moms always make sandwiches with butter for field trips because they spoil less easily than those with mayonnaise.

All this gear just for another field trip to the Museum of Science and Industry. In most cases, the floor plan of the building was memorized by suburbanite grade-schoolers before entering the third grade; and, if they were allowed to buy their lunches, the museum's cafeteria services were rated on a scale which ran from gross to "almost as good as McDonald's." Having the option to buy pop was considered the only definite plus on the museum's behalf. The place already had a few points against it because of its distance. Twenty-five minutes on the expressway in an orange bus was irritating, and especially embarrassing if you had to sit next to one of the room-mothers the whole way there. Nancy knew that with the luck she had been having that she'd get stuck sitting next to either Robbie Allendorf's mom or Lisa Thurmer's mom. They were both obese, and could easily fill a bus seat by themselves without an extra, neighboring fifth grade body.

During the ride downtown, Nancy thought about how she hated field trips, and how vividly she remembered falling in the Brookfield Zoo stepping-stone-pond on her first field trip. These excursions were always awful, and this one was no exception!

Her knee socks continued to fall to her ankles, and, as she glanced out the bus window, a flying gum wrapper jetted past her face from a few windows in front of her. Robbie Allendorf then turned around in his seat and blew a bubble the size of a large lightbulb at her. It collapsed on his face and simultaneously he made a disgusting smirk back at her. Nancy slithered lower into the uncomfortable green, plastic bus seat and covered her head with the grey sweater.

The day had just begun and already she wanted to take the "L" home.
A dawn's swim to the uninhabited island

by Erika T. Lersch

Fort Slocum.  
Deserted of human existence  
Large brick buildings  
centered a park with trees.  
Rows of abandoned stores that are not sold out.  
Antiques For Sale

no sun, gray

Three statued mannequins in wedding gowns  
dim with dust and aged webs

A house, a room, stairs, and yet  
another room.  
Opened shutters to a wonderful view.  
I pierce out.  
Other rooms have a better view,  
I must show it to someone.

Approaching the upstairs door,  
entering to see a window straight ahead  
a portrait to the left,  
a man, a captain  
a ghost.  
He appears, not startled am I  
older than his portrait  
I leave.

To the rowboat I go, accompanied  
still dim  
gray, clouding  
the dock is decrepit, the boat old  
a canoe that tips and flips  
I struggle.

Destination arrives.  
invisible and secret, spattered pieces of broken  
glass to barefoot natives.
When I was a boy, swinging from
Trees in the yard of my childhood
Stomping ground, I dreamed of glory.
Now an old man in Lockerbie Square,
I just want my whiskey in silence.
Damn poems about sunshine and boyhood
Have made me a rich old bastard, but
How can I get back to some time that
Isn't just a dream held inside a bottle?
My friends read my poetry and pat my
Backside like a dog—they love me
In public but kick me in private.
And I could tell you stories, just
As well as my good Mr. Twain, who's
Held me up at many banquet and
Speaking engagement, that would
Make you laugh just like you
Just had a few—God, if only a man's
Money could buy him his youth,
I'd be somewhere now where
I could have release from my
Prisons I built with poems
About something lost forever.
5th Ave. — New York City  
by Edwina Hearn

Crowds of people walking in all directions, every other one wearing a fur coat on those chilly days. (Street people dressed in rags, wrapped in blankets. Sitting against buildings, begging.) But no one sees them. They are window shopping, the windows filled with the newest, strangest, most gorgeous clothes.

Trenchcoated and Delivered  
by Erika T. Lersch

Trenchcoated and Delivered,  
In a brown garbage, grocery bag,  
Three Silver Sleeted Green Jellied Gropes  
Dug,  
a wandering hole  
for China.

Blue  
by Michael Anthony Moore

Blue, blue, blue  
Paint  
Drips onto my meery window pane.  
"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?"  
Now doesn't that sound familiar?  
Will Shakespeare.  
He was a good ol' boy.
In all the town of Coventry we kneeled,
Behind the dark of sash and shuttered eves,
And in this darkness we our eyes concealed
And hid us from all sins the mind conceives.
We whispered of our lady's gentle form
Alone and bare upon a horse of white
While praying her bold deed would somehow warm
The stubbornness of our good liege's spite.
But Thomas, son of ignorance and ire,
Not willing to contain his evil lust
Peeked through a crack to slake his sick desire.
His gazings made a mockery of us.
Yet had our faith delivered us a prize:
We laughed as Thomas begged to keep his eyes.
Any Port in a Storm: The Roach

by Robert Roach

"I don't give a damn! He's gotten too big! He's gotta go down—and I say now! I know the scum. I've seen inside his mind. He's spread too thin and right now he's vulnerable. If we're ever gonna plant him, now's the time. There ain't never gonna be a better opportunity."

"But how, boss? We got good boys—good enough for our needs—but to go after him, they'd be bitin' off more than they can chew. Maybe we can turn him. Maybe he just needs more time."

"I'm tired a' waitin'! He buys it and he buys it now!"

"Yeah, boss, but maybe with more time he'll—"

"What did I just say?!!" the large, heavy-set Sicilian man demanded, punctuating his query with a solid backhand across his objector's face. "If our boys can't do it, then pass me the phone. My word counts for something in this city. Bugs' gang has as much ta' gain and lose in this as we do. So does Jimmie's. If our boys ain't enough, we'll get enough fer a' army."

"I don't think the boys'd like workin' with Bugs' boys much. Er any other gang. It's a matter a' pride. I don't think they'd like ta go along."

"They'd like it lots less ta be floatin' feet up in the lake and that's what they'll be doin' if I hear one damned thing. And that's a promise."

"You chicken-livered whores got anything else to cry about? You all still afraid of your shadows? Since Al went up the river, I've run this town and I've decided. It's time fer the Roach to die!"

Frank Nitty's business council broke up that Thursday afternoon after he'd made calls to other key gangland leaders. And, though many initially resisted, all gave in to his pleas, negotiations or threats as each individual case demanded. He'd assembled roughly 100 men to do his dirty work. The Roach would be dead by Sunday morning.

Nitty felt quite pleased with himself and everyone around him could tell. As the men filed out, another figure caught Frank's eye. With a sly, lustful grin plastered on his mug, he motioned the winsome young lady into the room. Nor was she slow to respond. The girl had been a streetwalker—some would have said that though she'd changed locales, she was still a hooker. Such thoughts weren't terribly important. What was paramount was that she'd risen in life because she was Frank Nitty's toy. So, whether or not she enjoyed his caress, she made sure the crime boss was ecstatic over her touch. And he was. So much so that Nitty often spoke to her during the throes of passion about extremely confidential matters. And in the midst of that particular "Matinee," Frank was true to design.

Thursday afternoon faded into Thursday night, and all on Chicago's South Side was as calm as it ever was. The night shift—legal, illegal, moral and immoral—went to work. And, walking on an errand in the midst of that human flotsam and jetsam was the winsome young woman. As she passed a
darkened doorway she heard a feminine gasp and felt a light touch on her shoulder. Turning on a dime, she looked into an attractive face.

“Cybil” the mistress exclaimed as she gazed at the black girl’s features. “Girl, what’re you doin’ down in these parts?!” Cybil asked with a smile. “Last I heard you’d hit the big time and the easy life.”

“Yeah, I really can’t complain. I get treated fine. No more streetwalkin’—at least not till Nitty gets tired of me. And I do my best to see that he don’t get tired. Even though the bum’s gotta be one of the world’s all-time lousiest lays.” Both ladies laughed at that juncture.

“But beln’ with Frank ain’t so bad. He hardly slaps me around and he’s usually at his war councils or whatever, so I’m left to myself.”

“Yeah,” Cybil concurred, “it does seem as though he’d have to spend a lotta time tendin’ to business.”

“You know it, girl. In fact, today—now you can’t say a word of this to anyone else.” The black hooker nodded her head. “Well, today, Frank commissioned his boys to rub out the Roach! Can you believe it?!” Cybil’s face reflected her skepticism.

“I don’t think Frank’s men can cancel out the Roach.”

“But it won’t just be Frank’s boys. He talked to a bunch of other bosses and got the best of their boys all together in an army to go after the Roach. Isn’t that wild?!”

Cybil didn’t talk much the remainder of the conversation and Frank’s tackhead carried their talk into other areas. Finally, all talked out, the two parted company wishing each other well. Cybil knew what she had to do. Her mind was made up. And so the lovely lady-of-the-evening made a bee-line for Comiskey. In a rarity of note, the White Sox had won a game, and happy fans made good “johns.” Especially happy—usually inebriated—White Sox fans. Amassing information as she traveled, she swiftly found the one she was looking for: Sadie. As quickly as she could, Cybil filled Sadie’s ears with that awful news. And, though she did a good job masking her feelings, Cybil could tell that Sadie’s heart, in addition to her head, was filled with evil forebodings.

“Thanks for coming and telling me this, Cybil,” Sadie said as her mind ran in circles a mile a minute.

“It’s okay, girl,” she responded, “After all the Roach did for Spat and Rhines- stone, I owe him a helluva lot more than this.”

“I’ve gotta go find him!” Sadie exclaimed.

“Go and find him,” Cybil said, understanding what her friend couldn’t say. “Make him leave town or somethin’. ’Cause it hurts too much to lose your man.” And with that the black lady melted into the night with only the fading sound of her clicking heels left to signify that she’d been there.

Sadie whistled over a taxi and hopped in.

“Where to, toots?” the cabby asked in his most macho voice.

“I don’t know,” Sadie responded, for in truth there was no way to tell exactly where the Roach was at that moment.

“How about my place?” the cabby offered, flashing the most seductive smile he could muster. Sadie merely ignored him.

“South,” she finally announced. “Go south on State until I ask you to turn.”

“Is this gonna be cash or compensation?” the cabby asked, reaching back to stroke her thigh.

Like lightning, a four-inch blade appeared in Sadie’s hand and was pressed uncomfortably next to the jerk’s Adam’s apple. “Keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road,” she hissed through clenched teeth. “Or I’ll introduce your balls to your toes. Now drivel.”

Following her instincts, Sadie rode in the cab to the 4700th block of
Cottage Grove. After paying her fare—without a tip—she stepped from the car, wondering how in the world she would find her elusive masked lover.

Just then three shots rang out from the midst of Washington Park.

Sadie raced toward the sounds, hoping her instincts hadn't steered her wrong. After running through the autumnal verdure for a couple of minutes, she came upon three still forms. She knew the men were dead—when he aimed to kill he didn't miss.

"Some assholes," she suddenly heard a deep, masculine voice state. "Two young kids—not more than eighteen—decided for a romantic walk in the park," the voice continued. "Next time they'll be smarter. They'll pick a better time or a more lighted place. They're damn lucky they have a next time."

"The punks caught 'em out here alone and decided they wanted the
money. Then they decided they wanted a little nookie. Then, for the fun of it, they'd off the boy. Were they wrong!

"Oh! Pardon my manners. Good evening, Sadie. How are you and what brings you out here?"

"They want you dead," the hooker said.

"Who is 'they'?"

"Most of the bosses. They got together around a hundred men between them. They're supposed to bring in your mask and your hat by Sunday morning."

The Roach became gravely silent.

"What are you gonna do?"

"There's only one thing to do," he replied, the steel in his voice unyielding.

"No!" Sadie exclaimed, her voice overflowing with passion. "There are a lot of things you can do. You can hide out for a while—no one would find you. Or you can leave town."

The Roach smiled his familiar smile and shook his head.

"Why not?"

"You know why," he said in a hushed voice.

"No! Why not?!" she demanded.

"I've never been that kind of man. Run? We know that if I don't I'll probably die. The odds don't seem to be in my favor. If I do hide or run—if I duck these scum—I'll live. But my soul, whatever makes me a man, will die. And in the truest sense my life would be over."

"Please," Sadie begged, her fears rolling down her face in liquid form.

The Roach took her face in his hands and stared into Sadie's attractive features. And as she peered back through her tears she was perplexed. On his face she didn't see anxiety or fear—not a trace of either. But she did see understanding, care and other emotions she couldn't define.

He drew her lips close to his until they touched. And there they stayed for a passionate, lingering kiss—perhaps their last kiss to share.

Then, drawing away from her and into the shadows, he all but disappeared. Still in sight were the tip of his fedora, a shoulder and half his face. And, turning, he looked at her once more.

"I love you, Sadie," he said, and then was gone without a sound.

The street erupted in a ball of crimson fury and for a moment daylight made a personal visit to 47th and Indiana. Winos scurried for more peaceful gutters and the late-night blacks rushed for safe haven at the Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments. Inside of thirty seconds the intersection was void of inhabitants. Save six forms, five of them lying still, as pieces of what had been their car burned with abandon.

"Damn it!" the animated form swore under his breath. He didn't mean to kill all of them. He needed information—information corpses could rarely give.

The shadowy warrior rushed through the wee hours of that Saturday morning to see if his luck would improve and if one of the slimes wasn't quite dead.

As he moved toward the men, his memories of three hours earlier came back. Midnight in the Windy City. He'd been on Hyde Park Blvd., again looking for pieces to his life or death puzzle. There, a group similar to this five man gang located him. Being on foot and five-to-one odds made the masked man think. The Roach didn't mind the stick's short end, but he was set
firmly against suicide.

Fortunately, Jackson Park was a quick pitch away. Unfortunately, a bullet could travel faster than a rock, so the Roach let his leather fly. And, just as he dove behind a tree, he heard the lead spray around him and off the life-saving bark.

He had no chance against all of them under those circumstances, and less than that if the fight drew long. The car was coming around for a second pass. The Roach had six bullets in his gun. The move he conceived was daring—but his best, and only, shot.

The Roach barrel-rolled free of the tree. Though one of the hoods leveled his tommy gun at the dapper detective, the Roach squeezed off his shot first. The Ford's left front tire exploded, turning the car over and flipping the men out of the convertible. But, though the action was furious, the happenings seemed in slow motion to the Roach's eye and mind. He sighted one man as the rat flew through the air. The Roach put a bullet in his brain. He also eliminated the guy with the tommy gun—both before they touched the ground. A third soul fell to Hell before the car stopped rolling. A fourth man was able to take a wild shot at the Roach. He missed. The Roach didn't. And the last man was crushed by the automobile.

His mind refocused on the task at hand. Three of the thugs that the Roach checked were dead. A fourth would die but hadn't quite succumbed. He coughed up a mass of gore and moaned. The Roach shook him by the shoulders.

"Hey!" the death dealer called into the dying man's ear.

He coughed up more blood, moaned and opened his eyes. The man didn't see the sharp, handsome lines of the Roach's face. He didn't feel his life's liquid force oozing slowly out. What he did see—what he was reliving—was a figure dressed in a pin-stripe suit, trench coat and a fedora running away from the car he drove. What he felt was the thrill of the chase and the exultation of apparent triumph, then surprise as their quarry stopped dead in his tracks. That, followed by shock—and fear, as what seemed to be a green pineapple lobbed from the prey's grasp and nestled in the car. And then all he remembered were the searing flames, the deafening roars and the pain-splashed red.

"Hey!" the Roach repeated, again shaking the scum. The clouds rolled out of the gangster's eyes, and, for a moment, the man put the immediate past out of his mind.

"What, asshole?" he demanded, sputtering blood as he spoke.

"You know what,": the harbinger responded.

"Yer gonna go down. Even now," cough, "every time you make a hit, every time you score, the rest of the boys squeeze in on you from all directions. Yer gonna die." The trigger man's body was racked with violent coughs and spasms. Then he grew still, his eyes staring into nothingness.

But, as if to make his last words prophetic, the report of a pistol shattered the air. And the Roach felt the cool heat of lead ripping through his left thigh. Wheeling in the direction of some nearby buildings, the crimefighter ran-limped toward the temporary sanctuary. Before he ducked behind the corner of a wall his own gun spoke, downing two of the assassins.

The Roach moved toward the north. The bullet had passed through his leg so he didn't fear its lodging in a more inopportune place. It was merely a nuisance. What could become a deadly nuisance.

He knew, that since the jackals smelled blood, the hunt would Intensify. And, wounded, his chances looked that much slimmer. But surrender never crossed his mind.
The Roach was thinking clearly and coolly. He needed to break through their ranks—get outside their ominous ring. Once outside he could have more success defending himself. He paused next to Bauman’s Delicatessen to catch his breath. Since he was headed north, there was no reason for him to alter his course, and no reason for him to break through the ranks at that moment. Dawn would soon wake the city, and daylight would hamper the assassins’ effectiveness. Their impunity would become more suspect. All the Roach needed was a safe place to rest and heal as best he could. For him that would be no problem. And he didn’t foresee any apprehension his disappearance would cause his hunters. They had drawn blood and had him surrounded. They could be patient. So, with no misgivings, the Roach found his spot and within minutes was drifting off to sleep.

Dusk had passed and neon fought to disperse the darkness of that Saturday evening. In the shadow of a shadow sat a lean, powerful figure. The
Roach had stopped the bleeding of his thigh and bandaged the wound to give his leg more support. But he was pissed off. A perfectly good pair of pants were ruined. He’d never get the blood stains out.

As closely as he could guesstimate, ninety-plus men still cruised the South Side looking for him. His plans were made. His jaw was set. It was time to live or die.

The Roach made a brief stop at one of his nearby munitions caches. He figured he’d need the weapons. This was war.

He made it all the way up to 35th and Prairie before he encountered another hit squad. Fortunately he’d seen them first. Half a block away was a dead end alley formed by numerous buildings. The assholes were a couple of blocks down the road. The only question left was, in his condition, could he lure them into the cul-de-sac before a bullet exploded in his spine?

With a grim smile on his face, the Roach leaped into the middle of the street. Hearing the surprised shouts behind him, he ran away with a pronounced limp. Thirty yards more—twenty yards—ten! He felt the breeze of a bullet by his cheek and its whistling in his ear. And then he rounded the corner of the alley.

“It’s a dead end!” one of the jerks screeched with joy as the Roach ducked into the by-way. “Step on it, Leol”

The Buick took the corner at a perilous speed. It bounced its lights off the alley’s back wall. The Roach was gone.

“What the hell?” one hood exclaimed. “Where the fuck is he?”

Just then a shot rang out; a man screamed, and fell over dead.

“What’s goin’ on h--?” another thug started. A bullet through his throat cut his query short.

The remaining hoods looked about with wild eyes. They saw nothing to shoot at.

“Move this tub, Leol” a survivor shouted.
Leo put the car into gear. Leo looked over his left shoulder to back out of the alley. Then, Leo died.

Panicking, the last two assassins tried to leap from the moving car but the buildings on either side prevented that form of retreat. One man tried to jump from the hood as the car backed into the street. He died in the air.

“Damn you!!” the last man howled, shooting blindly at any and everything. The shadows in front of him parted. Out stepped a tall well dressed man with a slight limp. Slowly, deliberately, he raised what seemed, to the gangster’s imagination, to be a cannon and leveled the gun at the man’s chest. With abandon, the hired killer yanked at his trigger. The chambers were empty.

“Goodbye,” the Roach said. And, as swiftly, he was the only living person in the street.

He checked Leo's watch. 11:45 it reported. The Roach dumped the car's garbage onto the pavement. He smiled, wondering if he’d be fined for littering. And then the masked avenger hopped into the car, put it into gear and drove on at an unassuming pace.

A squad camped out at Victory Monument so he couldn’t go down 35th to reach the lake. So he decided to bide the little time left to him, and wait for an hour or so until the hitmen would unknowingly open up a lane for him to slip through. He eased back and relaxed, fully intending to let Chronos race.

The Roach roused himself. It was 1:00 a.m. Sunday morning; due date for his head. He was sure the search for him would become more kinetic. Maybe by now the men had moved. Unfortunately not. He couldn’t just sit in hiding any longer—he would become the proverbial duck. It was once again time to do or die.
He eased the Buick out of its hiding place and proceeded north. Zigzagging a circuitous route, he avoided all signs of his assassins for a half an hour. Then all hell broke loose.

Suddenly three cars were on his tail. He had been right—the deadline had intensified the search for him.

Flying like the wind, the Buick tore up Michigan Ave. as the mobsters pressed their advantage. Bullets rained in a thunderstorm of destruction. The vanity of the killers undermined their effectiveness, nonetheless. Had one paused to shoot out the Roach’s tires, he would have been at their mercy. Instead they all went for the clean kill. Everyone wanted to be the man to kill the Roach. And, unwittingly, they played into his hands.

The Roach continued up Michigan, by-passing the downtown sights with no conscious thought. Only one thing kept rolling over in his mind: If I can make it to Monroe St. I have a chance. The high-speed chase glued two more hit squads onto the Roach’s tail. But he paid them no more mind than he did the other three cars. What did it matter that ten more hoods joined the chase? If they caught him those ten wouldn’t make the difference in the outcome—he’d still be dead. But if he could make it to Monroe he’d have a slight chance. At least he’d be able to take as many of them with him as he could.

His windshield was gone, and the Roach was forced to drive by periodically peeking over the dash board lest a well aimed bullet find its mark. Jackson Blvd. went by. Then Adams. And then, without apparently decreasing his speed, the Roach took a right onto Monroe. He crossed Columbus Drive and suddenly he heard an untimely explosion. One of the hoods had wisely shot out one of the Roach’s back tires. As the car lurched, beginning its death roll, the Roach sprang free of the tumbling vehicle. He landed with a thud on the northern grasses of Grant Park. The shadowy detective quickly rolled over and returned the favor—planting a bullet in the first car’s gas tank. Five fewer assholes to deal with.

The Roach then wasted no time scrambling across the intervening road, trying to reach the lake. He wasted no time because he knew his vulnerability would make him a hot target. Nor was he wrong. Bullets sang about him as he crossed that impromptu no-man’s land.

“Wait a second!” one hood shouted at all the others, “Let’s call all the other boys in off the streets. We got the fucker cornered so’s he can’t get away. Why should we take them unnecessary chances. Let’s git everybody together and gun ‘im down clean and proper-like.” Everyone seemed to approve, so the low-lifes waited about twenty minutes for the rest of the army to arrive. And, to make it easier to relocate the Roach, they fired occasionally on his lakefront position in order to keep him pinned down.

Then they attacked. Like a pack of crazed hyenas after a wounded lion, the mobsters descended on the Roach . . . or where they thought he was.

“I thought he was here?!” one befuddled hood shouted. “No!” another screamed, looking about a hundred yards up the shore, “there he isl”

Running north of the gangsters’ position, the Roach labored on. His wounded leg was slowing him down and the physical pressures of the preceding two days were beginning to tell on him. As he passed the Columbia Yacht Club, he knew he needed more time. Just a moment of confusion among their howling ranks. As he thought, his hand found a hard, oval-shaped object in his pocket. He didn’t want to use it. His supply was running low and if he was going to escape with his skin he’d need them later on. But if something didn’t happen to shake the assassins up, there’d be no later on. Already they were getting his range. He took the pull ring in his teeth, yanked it loose and lobbed another grenade among the mobsters. Its
eruption took out twenty more men and threw the lot of them into utter disorder.

The Roach reached the shipping area north of the park’s recreational area before the killers could again take up the trail. Without restraint, he began digging in the soil. He dug with such ferocity that inside of a minute he had a hole three feet deep and five feet across. Into this he poured out everything in his coat, save his gun and enough bullets for one round. By chance, he happened to glance at the ship whose shadow he was using as cover. Upon identifying its cargo, he smiled. Surely Providence was giving him a fair chance at his life. And that’s all he ever asked for.

As he rushed away from that point where the river met the lake, he heard sounds of the renewed pursuit. They seemed to be coming faster than ever. Evidently his tracks weren’t hard to follow.

“There he is!” one shouted as he squeezed off a shot. The Roach fell backwards as his left shoulder exploded in pain. He’d come too far to give in. So, the grim returner of death scrambled to his feet and ran back toward his hole.

“I hit him! I hit him!” the jubilant scum sang as the gang continued to dog their prey’s trail.

The Roach’s lungs burned as if the bellows of hell blew brimstone down his throat. His step was unsteady, but the river was just seconds away. With gunfire again bursting about him, he dove into the dank, dirty waters of the Chicago River. A minute passed. Then two. And nothing but silence and still water greeted the gangsters’ vigilance.

“Do you think he’s dead?” one asked another.

“He’s gotta be. Nobody could stay under like that—especially with the holes he’s got in ‘im, not to mention his coat and his suit.”

A grim smile came to the Roach’s face as he listened to the assassins. Though it was next to death sharing that dark, damp hold with the fierce Chicago river rats, he hadn’t quite succumbed. And, as the vermin nipped at his hands and feet, he really couldn’t complain. Any landing you could walk away from, as the saying went. Any port in a storm.

The two-legged rats weren’t quite where he wanted them. And it didn’t seem as though they’d move in that direction without stimulus—namely him. Cautiously, the Roach rose from his hiding place. Gingerly, he stepped from the shadows. Between him and them was his hole. He again smiled, thinking that at least his life hadn’t been dull.

“Hey, assholes!” he shouted at them as he shot one man in the chest. The mobsters surged toward him, shooting as they ran. Just a little nearer, the Roach thought. Just a hair closer to the boat. The night-time marauder shot another man as the pack drew even closer, screaming vile epithets as they ran. Suddenly, the Roach felt more searing lead rip through the right side of his stomach. Simultaneously, he pulled off a shot—one not directed at the men but at the feet of the front runners, at his hole in the ground.

Immediately, the explosives he’d planted blew. Concussion after concussion tore through the ranks. And as the dying men screamed, a more deafening roll of thunder shook the shore. The boat next to the Roach’s trap went up in a fireball, the munitions that comprised its store joining those of the Roach in destroying the gangsters’ ranks.

Frank Nitty smiled as he spoke on the phone.

“Yeah?” he responded. “No one left alive, right?” The voice on the other
end concurred, but cautioned the crime lord that all the corpses hadn't been identified.

"How about the Roach? Have you found him? Anything? His hat, his coat, his mask? No? Okay, keep lookin'. Yeah, you'd better get back with the other coppers' er else they might start puttin' two and two together. Ya' earned this month's pay-off, buddy-boy!"

Nitty hung up the phone with a malicious grin on his face. Nobody left alive. That included the Roach. Regardless how good a good guy the Roach was, even he couldn't have eluded that carnage.

Frank walked back toward his bedroom, still smiling, still thinking about the Roach. Funny, he suddenly thought, the floor hadn't been wet when he answered the phone. Nor had the window been open. With the icy finger of dread playing along his spine, Nitty spun about. There, in the room's densest shadows, a cigarette glowed.

"Good evening, Frank," the grave voice said.

Nitty's mouth was glued shut by fear.

"I didn't want to disturb your phone conversation so I let myself in. One of your police stoolies? Did he tell you what happened up around the park? Did he tell you that I'm dead?"

"I guess this is where I buy it," Nitty said, his voice finally unthawing.

"No, Frank," the Roach began, "this isn't where you buy it. You know your role in this world of ours, and I know mine. Plus, we both know each other's. With the right relationship—the proper degree of understanding and respect—you're right where I want you to be. I don't want you dead. Not yet. But this weekend has at least shown both of us that when I do want you six feet under, there's nothing you can do to stop me. I'll be in touch."

Suddenly, the cigarette went out and the Roach was gone.

---

Through the Window

by J. Keith Graybill

Through the window
a bird devastates bread crumbs
by peck, peck, peck.
Winds of woosh and trees of creaks prevail.
Snow falls and falls
and keeps falling,
until all is covered.

Within,
a spider spins a silent web,
ear the portrait of an idle dance.
Silence speaks;
accompanying the onlooking aged
waiting to be covered.
Sometimes, I Like to Walk the Shore

by Michelle L. Haymon

Sometimes,
I like to walk the shore—
Late at night—
When all the people are asleep.
The clouds understand me
When my thoughts drift toward them.
The waves dance about my feet
In an effort to make me happy.
Yet each grain of sand feels the weight
Of my heavy heart
As I plod towards home,
Step by step,
Weary from the heat of the day
And my long journey.

Transitory

by Dick Pearson

A hungry wave licks
The hard-packed sandy shore
Devouring footprints
Left by seashell seekers
Destroying evidence
Of their existence.

—Siesta Key 1/84
Juxta-Chill

by Matt Taylor

Cold, cold, bitter cold
It's taken human lives untold
Knocking down the strongest man
In the frozen Northern land.

Cold, cold, Wintery cold
Rips down walls and then takes hold
Pierces through to every part
Almost to our life, the heart.

Cold, cold, chilling cold
But we Inside by heat are lulled
To sleep by embers warming red
And many dreams dreamed in our head.

Cold, cold, sometimes cold
We wait it out then watch unfold
A spring of beauty, life, and grace
A cool wind blowing in our face.

Cold, cold, where's the cold
It's Summer now with flowing gold,
Flaming orange and soft sky blues
Flowers dappled many hues.

Cold, cold, Falling cold
Along with leaves of colors bold
Autumnal breezes, sharp but fine
Bring Summer memories to my mind.

Cold, cold, cyclic cold
It's like a story oft retold
For Winter's come and soon shall be
Another season's memory.
On Holcomb Gardens

by John Purcell

That green moat strikes the eye immediately upon entering the place. It is a strange green, deeper and shinier than its pea-soup consistency would at first give reason to expect. There are bottles and pieces of paper floating along the edges, as well as larger objects captured under the layers of green slime, appearing as bodies submerged in the river Styx. It leads past a small underground utility building with the words "Morrison Motel" scrawled onto the door, and runs past an almost circular parking area where people sit in cars waiting for something.

A burly black man sits in one car, a 1937 roadster, while in the other, a young couple smokes marijuana while arguing about the location of an eight-track tape. The girl finally leaves the car, shaken after an exchange of obscenities, and strides away in her tight blue jeans and army fatigue jacket. The black man smiles and closes his eyes, nodding slowly.

Along the dirt pathway, rows of bushes tinged with brown move slightly in the stirring of a breeze. In the center of the garden grow rows of wilted flowers, their edges faded like the pages of an old magazine. Grunting football players run along the pathway surrounding the garden, and smack each other on the shoulders and bottoms in clumsy camaraderie. A bronze statue stands in an empty fountain, a statue of Prosperine by a Frenchman named Toulouse, tarnished with a blue stain across her naked breasts. The smell of something burning, a thick sooty smell, floats in the air over the statue and forms a strange halo around the head of Prosperine. Sounds of voices singing far off and distant, of car doors opening and slamming, of the occasional crow's caw, all echo around the garden, seeming finally to deposit themselves in front of the fountain.
## ART CREDITS

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